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Kayayei equipped with livelihood skills, legal literacy

Ms Esther Ankrah (second left) taking the kayayei through the process of making beaded sandals.



By: Rosemary Ardayfio Thursday, 10 December 2015 12:28

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A two-month pilot project to empower adolescent female migrants to make informed decisions and improve their economic status is ongoing in Accra and Kumasi.

The major expected outcome of the project is that the migrants, who mostly work as head porters, popularly referred to as 'Kayayei', would be protected from Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and its consequences, including early and forced marriages.

One hundred kayayei in two urban market centres, Agboghloshie in the Greater Accra Region, and Kejetia in the Ashanti Region are benefiting directly from project interventions including integrated rights-based literacy training, livelihood skills development and the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception.

The project, being implemented by the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa (SWAA) Ghana, with financial support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is also expected to indirectly benefit about 500 kayayei.

Mrs Lucy Owusu-Darko, Technical Advisor to SWAA, said the circumstances of the kayayei put them at high risk of forced cohabitation and GBV.

"This project is therefore designed to empower the kayayei economically and also educate them on their sexuality as a means to reduce their vulnerability to GBV and early and forced marriages," she said.

She added that SWAA hoped to expand the project to reach more kayayei next year.

Sexual and reproductive health

Mrs Owusu-Darko noted that in view of the conditions that kayayei lived and worked in, they generally did not seek medical care from public health facilities and usually engaged in self-medication.

The SWAA project, therefore, provides sexual and reproductive health services including pregnancy testing, counselling and provision of contraceptives, HIV testing and STI prevention, especially for adolescents who ply their trade in the markets.

The services are provided on outreach basis and therefore reach the kayayei at their "door step".

In addition, the kayayei, together with the market women and truck pushers are educated on violence against women and early and forced marriages.

She said SWAA would work with various service providers such as the Ghana Health Service and the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG) to establish referral points to facilitate 'continuation of care' for the kayayei.

Legal literacy

Adopting a rights-based approach, SWAA, in collaboration with the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), has also provided an integrated rights-based literacy training to 30 kayayei to establish referral points for legal literacy and addressing human rights abuses.

Fifteen literate kayayei and gatekeepers from each market have participated in a five-day paralegal training.

Some of the topics were: Girls and Women's Human Rights Laws, Policies, Legal Literacy, Early and Forced Marriage and its Effects, Cohabitation, Gender-based Violence, Where to Seek Redress/ Refer and Advocacy.

With the training, the paralegals now have the task of carrying out public education on legal literacy on a one-on-one basis and during integrated outreach programmes.

They are also be expected to make the necessary referrals and advocate to end early and forced marriages.

Livelihood skills

Fifty kayayei aged 10 to 19 years have also been trained in alternative livelihood skills, small-scale business development and management to improve their economic status.

For 10 days, the kayayei were trained in soap and bead making and the production of bags, and sandals. In addition, they were provided with book keeping, marketing and savings skills to help them track their products and sales and develop the habit of savings.

Addressing the kayayei at the closing ceremony of the livelihood skill training, Mr Amadu Bawa, Assistant Representative of UNFPA, urged them to "use what you have learnt to improve your lives."

He said the UNFPA had resolved to partner the SWAA to work towards reducing poverty, which drives the kayayei to migrate to the big cities for greener pastures

"We will continue to support more vulnerable girls with skills training to improve their lives and be an example to others", he said.

Ms Esther Ankrah, the training facilitator, exhorted kayayei to use their newly acquired skills to supplement their income.

Start-up materials are provided to the trainees to use the skills to raise funds to cater for their needs and improve their economic status.

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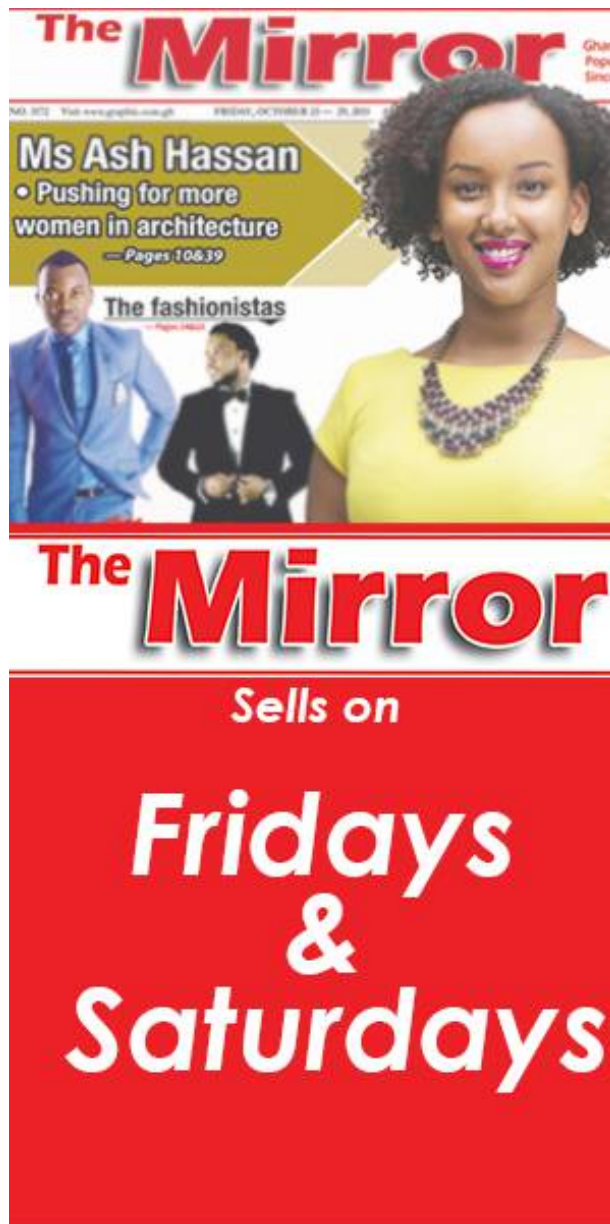
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